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II. KLAMATH SHAMANISM

INTRODUCTION

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Klamath religion centers so largely in shamanism that it may be permissible to describe the whole in terms of shamanistic practices, the spirits with which they are concerned, and the acquisition of supernatural powers. There is little ceremonialism apart from the shamans' performances. There is a rite for girls at puberty, a dance in preparation for war and another in celebration of captured scalps, some formal feasting at marriage, and of recent date the Ghost dance of 1870.

[881] [721] [727] [585] [786]

The religion is only weakly developed. Power is sought from a host of spirits whose characteristics are not sharply defined. These are predominantly birds and animals, winds, lightning and the like, and a handful of anthropomorphic beings. They are however definitely localized in many instances and partly identified with the figures of mythology. But there has been no attempt to marshal the spirits into an ordered pantheon. Relations to the spirits have no ethical implication. The belief in a land of the dead, too, stands apart from the spirits and their functions. It has solely a folkloristic existence, for it little concerns the actions of the living.

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Power is deliberately sought by almost every Klamath. There are times that are especially propitious; at puberty, in distress, or on the loss of a wife, a husband, or a child. The mode of seeking and the revelation are stereotyped: one fasts at night on mountain tops, running about, piling up rocks, or diving beneath lonely pools. Mourners at least must first purify themselves in the sweat-lodge. The looked-for response is unconsciousness, a profuse hemorrhage at nose and mouth, and a spirit's song revealed in a dream. The spirit is not the seeker's guardian and exacts of him no special conduct, no offerings, no venerations. There is only one obligation; he must accept the blessing and use his power once the spirit makes itself known. The power is motivated by the song; the song and the spirit are one and inseparable. There is little specialization of spirits and their powers: curing, gambling, hunting, love-making, and shamanistic trickery are fields in which any spirit may operate.

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The shaman himself is, or was, the outstanding figure of Klamath society. He had no rival in the chiefs, the rich man, until the coming of the whites brought a redistribution of emphasis in Klamath life. Chiefs had previously been persons of little influence.

All this is familiar enough among Indians; the Klamath differ only in particulars. In its several aspects, their religion, as well as its practice, is one with that of the Great Basin, Plateau, and Mackenzie tribes.

THE POWER QUEST

The quest for supernatural aid is open to everyone, men and women, boys and girls. It is a constantly recurring feature of their lives. Everyone, perhaps without exception, seeks the powers at least once during his lifetime and further experiences seem to be repeatedly sought.

The first occasion is always puberty. I doubt that boys and girls are expected to be uniformly successful in securing aid at this time, because, it was said, at shamanistic performances those who had power might sing their songs. This may imply that the others either never acquired power or had lost it. My informants' frequent emphasis on the period of mourning for a husband, wife, or child marks this, too, as a peculiarly pregnant period when power may be successfully sought. At least at such a time a man loses his power and must seek again if he wishes to regain it. A man also seeks power at the birth of a first child. But it is not only the crises of life that provide occasion; the quest may be undertaken at any time, and it is the practice of such as gamblers and shamans to renew and enhance their powers by frequent attempts. The quest is called spū'tu.

The experience does not ordinarily include a vision, but is made manifest in a song heard in a dream. In some instances where a vision is had, a dream song follows, but it is clear that the latter is the essential experience. In the following case a man and a woman had identical visions but to the man alone fell the experience leading to power.

The grandfather of a Klamath Falls shaman went to stō'kmōte, the point of Eagle Ridge, in the evening. There is a spot in the lake where bubbles rise. Horses lived in this long ago (!). When this man reached the headland he saw two pinto horses, with long manes, rearing against each other from the water. He was not frightened but took off his clothes and plunged into the water in order to secure power. When he recovered consciousness he found himself again on land. From that time he was lucky; he began to get many pintos, large horses. Because of this experience his grandson, the shaman, also acquired, in his turn, spirit songs of all kinds.

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Taken as a whole Klamath material culture is of Plateau type with strong leanings toward northeastern California. But their social and religious culture has a different aspect. While basically of the extremely simple Basin-Plateau type, social habits reflect the Northwest Coast, religious ones rather those of northern California and western Oregon. 171* 101 105

The basis of Klamath religious experience is that of the northern interior, the Basin, and the Northwest Coast, in distinction to California and the Southwest. The experience is deliberately sought and the power obtained is of a generalized, unspecialized nature. In this they resemble as well the generality of North Americans. Even their spirits are of the sort universal east of the Pacific coast. Specific Northwest Coast influence appears in the circumscription of general spirit repossession to the midwinter month. On the other hand, the shaman novice's inaugural dance, which gives at least as much color to Klamath shamanism, is characteristic of northern California and western Oregon. The Klamath form of it is, rather, Oregonian. Details of shamanism, on the other hand, link more firmly with northern, especially northeastern, California. 171* 791 •

Social organization is extremely simple, and it is quite patent that as late as the end of the eighteenth century, it resembled that of the Basin and Plateau in every particular. Even now social stratification is only weakly developed. Chiefs were only recently set off from the mass, their functions vague and their influence slight. At the very moment that Klamath society began to break down with the coming of the whites, they first imported from the Columbia river judicial functions for the chiefs. Chiefs are the wealthiest individuals, but they are not chiefs because they are wealthy. Their selection is still based on principles of personal ability. The basis of this differentiation, wealth, came from the same direction, but the accompanying principle of the Northwest Coast, caste stratification, never reached here; nor did the chief's adjunct, a speaker or advocate, although this functionary is known in the Plateau and Basin as well as in the Northwest. At the other end of the scale, slavery is apparently an old institution, but was of little importance until wealth began to figure among them. The Northwest Coast concept of status based on wealth appears again in marriage, here regularly by purchase. But social estimation did not rest on the amount paid, which was in fact very little. With so slight an emphasis on rank and wealth, those northwestern corollaries, *local exogamy to maintain the one and the family compact following* 171* 171* 177 622 171* 567 171* 556 584

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NATIVE MYTH AND MODERN RELIGION AMONG THE KLAMATH INDIANS

By Robert F. Spencer

In a recent study[1] of social change among the Klamath Indians of southern Oregon, informants revealed an unformalized synthesis of aboriginal and modern Christian religious beliefs. These involve, among other ideas, an identification of the Klamath culture hero with personages in the Christian pantheon such as the God-Father, Jesus, and Satan. This is of interest since the contemporary Klamath have lost all formalized aspects of their older culture. The major institutions of the past have fallen by the way and, in their overt forms at least, have been replaced by those of the encroaching Anglo-American society. Acculturation is so far along that the observer can elicit only covert survivals of aboriginal ideas. Although the tone of the folk culture has been lost by the Klamath, the reservation life, a common economy, and the wardship status enforced by external governmental agencies combine to effect a haphazard solidarity in the group. It is hence not surprising to discover a rephrasing of older values to meet modern situations. A case in point is the attempt by many tribal members, young and old, to find continuity in folklore and so to read Christian meaning into aboriginal myth.

Klamath culture of the past was not essentially different in its orientation from that of many western tribes. Because the tribe was geographically marginal to several culture areas, it is possible to note the composite nature of its culture and to discern the realignment and reintegration of elements which it shared with California, the Plateau-Basin, and the Northwest Coast. In its overall configuration, the native culture differed from that of the adjacent gathering peoples because the Klamath had settled on the lakes and marshes of the region and depended on fish and a wild water-lily. Beyond the basic economic structure, however, one may note the California flavor of the separatistic hamlets with their loose social and political organization; the weakly developed (and possibly late) wealth complex, suggestive of the Northwest and the Oregon coast; and the formalized shamanistic religion which points to affinities with tribes in the Plateau, California, and elsewhere.[2]

[1] This paper is based on data collected during two summer field sessions, 1948 and 1949, on the Klamath Reservation. Field research was subsidized by grants no. 21 (Reserve Fund, 1947) and no. 1132 (1949) from the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, and by research funds from the Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

[2] Cf. Leslie Spier, *Klamath Ethnography* (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, 30, Berkeley, 1930), 224-325; Verne F. Ray, *Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America* (F. W. Hodge Anniversary Volume, III, Los Angeles,

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To treat aboriginal Klamath religion under three headings of shamanism, power quest, and cosmology is patent oversimplification. In nature and content these features formed an integrated configuration reflecting a major cultural preoccupation. It is true that the shaman in each community played a dominant role and in his capacity as curer, magician, and entertainer commanded the utmost in social prestige. On the other hand, as was common in western North America, every individual, at puberty and thereafter, deliberately and repeatedly sought contact with a variably defined spirit world. Thus Klamath culture had a variation of the American Indian guardian-spirit theme. Less specifically formalized, and so perhaps, less well integrated, were the elements of myth and tale, the rationalizations for the presence of various natural phenomena, for eschatology, and for the general conception of the universe. Like adjacent tribes, the Klamath interested themselves in animal spirits. These were of particular importance in providing shamanistic power. In the individual power quest, however, the sources from which spiritual forces emanated were less specifically defined. A rather wide range of supernatural powers was recognized, some being animals, some vaguely anthropomorphic, others relating to such natural features as mountains, streams, rocks, or even landmarks like Crater Lake. In respect to these forces an involved folklore has arisen which allows some classification of the Klamath concepts of the supernatural. In this realm, for example, are views about the abode of the dead and the nature of ghosts and souls, these being carefully differentiated from nonhuman spirits.[3] Here too is a body of myth relating to superhuman dwarf men and women, to the forces in specific places or natural phenomena in the Klamath terrain, and finally, the most important for this discussion, to the culture hero, the anthropomorphic Kemu'kemps.[4]

Kemu'kemps, while not usually identified with an animal spirit, has many characteristics suggesting the folklore regarding Coyote in the Plateau-Basin. He is at once creator and trickster, angrily forbidding in some contexts, indifferent in others, and in still others a ludicrous buffoon.

Essentially human in conceptualization (a myth complex relating to a human hero also occurs in adjacent regions), Kemu'kemps is sometimes identified with the marten, whose younger brother is weasel, and with the winds.[5] In the myths assembled by Gatschet, he constantly rivals his magically born son 'Ayšiš, whose destruction he repeatedly plans, often with the result of encompassing his own. Weather, such as rain or heat, was also attributed to him. Kemu'kemps is also the creator, and there are numerous folktales which tell how he brought various locations into being. At his instigation,

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1939), cf. 145-149; Erminie Voegelin, *Culture Element Distributions: Northeastern California* (Anthropological Records, 7: 2, Berkeley, 1942).

[3] Spier, 1930, pp. 100 ff.

[4] Cf. Albert Samuel Gatschet, *The Klamath Indians of Southwestern Oregon* (U. S. Geological Survey, Contributions to North American Ethnology, Washington, 1890), pt. 1, lxxix-lxxxv, and pt. 2, 138-140. A summary is also given by Spier, 1930, loc. cit.

[5] Gatschet, 1890, pt. 1, lxxxii-iii.

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Here Christian elements, like the sign of the cross, were interspersed with native Klamath traits relating to the shamanistic seance and to the aboriginal folklore. The acculturation process also involved modification and integration of Ghost Dance forms introduced from adjacent tribes.[10] The growth of tribal, rather than hamlet, factions split the reservation at this time, and there was the pattern, familiar among other Indians, of chief rivalling shaman and of progressive against conservative. While the 1870 cult is one abortive attempt at native cultural revival, the post-contact history of the Klamath is replete with illustrations of a religiously conceived resistance to the disrupting pressures from without. Variously listed are the Earthlodge Cult, the Dream Dance, and several other revivalistic and messianic forms.[11]

By about 1900, nativistic movements on the Klamath Reservation had burned themselves out. Tribal life of a half century ago was fraught with essentially the same problems which dog it today. People entered into economic competition in the greater society and became nominally Christian (and so lent Methodist sanctions to social institutions). However, the older values were only with difficulty accommodated to the new. One or two shamanistic practitioners survived but others felt that their power was gone. One informant tells of her uncle, a shaman, saying sadly, "My songs (shaman power) have left me." Shamanism as an integrating factor in Klamath life and in that of other Pacific Northwest groups is reflected in another important movement, somewhat different from the frenzied Ghost Dance. This is the Shaker Cult, also a synthesis of native and Christian elements but with longer range objectives. Originating in the north in the 1880's, it diffused slowly, reaching the Klamath in 1914.[12] Basically Christian in its orientation, the Shaker Cult admits a fundamentalistic Protestant eschatology; but in its emphasis on a "God is Light" theme, the employment of the cross as a particularly efficacious holy symbol, the use of bells, and the presence of curing seances, it assumed a peculiar flavor. Numerous aboriginal elements also are discernible.[13] Techniques reminiscent of shamanistic curing are employed (for example, the removing of causes of disease from the sufferer's body by means suggestive of shamanistic legerdemain), although the Shakers vigorously disclaim the older shamans, describe their work as of the devil, and insist that the spirit of God effects Shaker cures. But the Shaker Cult, too, although it enjoyed a following on the Klamath Reservation for some years, is dying. A few older people now meet in each other's homes for services. The Shaker church at Chiloquin, Oregon, is now rarely used, and the younger

[10] Spier, 1927, p. 45. The Ghost Dance was evidently introduced from the Northern Paiute. The Klamath held that Kemu'kemps was coming from the south and that the dead were to return. See p. 53.

[11] Nash, 1937, pp. 412-435; cf. Cora DuBois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance* (Anthropological Records, 3: 1, Berkeley, 1939), 130-134.

[12] Leslie Spier, *The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives: The Source of the Ghost Dance* (General Series in Anthropology, no. 1, Menasha, Wis., 1935), 54.

[13] Erna Gunther, "The Shaker Religion of the Northwest," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, ed. Marian Smith (New York, 1949), pp. 37-76.

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reservation residents are not attracted. Like its more dramatic predecessors, the Shaker religion fails as a bulwark against societal disorganization.

The modern Klamath are in the main nominally Christian. Many are allied with local churches: Protestant groups attract a fair following; some are Roman Catholics; others now and again join the itinerant Pentecostal and Holiness groups. While many Klamath are unquestionably religious in the accepted Christian sense, the church offers a primary social outlet to those who value group association. Whatever the function of the church on the reservation today, apparently it has no aboriginal vestiges in its ritual or organization. It would be impossible to say to what extent tribal members find a link with the native past in the spiritual curing practices of such bodies as the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, which, however, clearly make no concessions to aboriginal concepts.

It thus seems evident that the overt forms of tribal religion are gone. The Klamath majority is now avowedly Christian even though church affiliation is not universal. Religious attitudes seem highly diverse. Some individuals, while indifferent to religious tenet, are admittedly attracted by the display or by social opportunities. Some are devout, others ignore the churches entirely. Still others, whether or not church members, speculate on religious questions, show considerable introspective preoccupation, or are frankly curious about native religion and Christianity. Their opinions and attitudes demonstrate that the aboriginal past is not wholly dead. In this consideration, shamanistic curing may be ruled out, since modern medicine is generally accepted by the Klamath and, in any case, shamanistic patterns have merged with the decaying Shaker Cult. Since this is so, the less formalized aspects of the aboriginal religion survive to intrude now and again into modern conceptualization.

The survival of cosmological features may still be observed here and there. For example, tales of people and animals turned to stone by Crow's laughter are half-credulously recounted by young and old. A surviving custom or two, reflecting the older world-view, might also be noted. A boy who kills his first deer is well advised not to eat its meat himself. By giving the game away, he averts failure in his next hunting expedition. Hunting on the reservation today is a sport, no economic value being attached to it. (Aboriginally too, the Klamath were so well adapted to their specialized lake-marsh economy that hunting played a distinctly minor part.) This custom, which may stem from the emphasis on wealth and generosity, is laughed down today but it is still practised. Another very common belief is that animals can speak Klamath but not English. A howling coyote is recognized by young and old as a harbinger of death; the owl says, "'Maklaks, 'maklaks," which "when you hear it, it means somebody close to you is going to die." The Klamath word means human and refers to the tribe itself. Taboos on the first game of the hunter, the first wild foods gathered, as well as fear of the owl are widely distributed among western tribes.

But more pertinent here are the modern Klamath views based on the past which either influence actual behavior or bridge a gap, conceptually, specu-